Mother and Lover Equals Other:

Varda's Mortal Critique of the Feminine as Annex to the Masculine Subject

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THROUGHOUT HER FILMOGRAPHY Agnès Varda has engaged with several of the dominant topics of Western, feminist politics from the seven decades in which she has been producing moving-image works. For instance, she has probed the meaning of the physiological alterations during pregnancy and questioned the accepted edicts of authority over the female body in this period of gestation in *L'Opéra Mouffe* (1958) and *L'une chante, l'autre pas* (1977). Between the creation of these films, in 1971 Varda signed The Manifesto of the 343, written by Simone de Beauvoir and signed by French women declaring they had had illegal abortions.[1] It was a key event in the struggle for the legalization of abortion in France. Several other of Varda's films also provide evidence of a resistance to the dominance of an objectifying gaze. In *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962), for example, the director challenges the sexualizing gaze that attempts to define the feminine image, and in *Sans toit ni loi* (1985) and *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000) rejects the gaze that valorizes the worth of an/other according to patriarchal structures.[2]

Yet, famously, Varda considers herself more of a woman who makes films than a specifically feminist filmmaker, a stance that has led Kelley Conway to approach the director's work as that of a woman making films in France, rather than through a lens of feminist politics.[3] This self-definition as a female creator rather than a feminist one has ramifications for the ways in which Varda's films are interpreted. However, scholars have appraised Varda's productions

through the prism of keystone feminist literature, such as Rebecca J. DeRoo who plots the influence of de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe* (1949) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963, translated into French in 1964) on Varda's 1965 film *Le bonheur*, the film I analyse here.[4] Additionally, in an interview discussing *L'une chante, l'autre pas*, Varda herself cites de Beauvoir as an influence on her sympathies for the French feminist movement.[5]

It seems, then, that there is a balance to be struck here. While Delphine Bénézet argues that Varda's interaction with her feminine corporeality "constitutes a decisive contribution to feminism,"[6] Claire Johnston has suggested that the portrayal of 'female' fantasy in Varda's films "constitutes one of the nearest approximations to the facile day-dreams perpetuated by advertising that probably exists in the cinema."[7] Considering both these elements as they occur in *Le bonheur* (the depiction of the female body and the appropriation of the advertising image), I analyze the film as part of the *œuvre* of a female filmmaker who inevitably engages with feminist concerns. Indeed, Kate Ince has argued that "the political interest of [Varda's] documentary-style depiction of women's lives has often – as was particularly the case with the 1964 film *Le bonheur* – been questioned, doubted, and found to be more feminine than feminist" (602). Here I will respond to the pursuits of Varda the female creator in *Le bonheur*, drawing on relevant feminist film theory and contemporary feminist thinkers, although not to the degree that Hilary Neroni has recently done so excellently with *Cléo de 5 à 7*.[8]

I explore the issues of the aesthetic representation of women and the roles that they are expected to fulfil in a patriarchal ideal – both of which Varda had addressed before *Le bonheur* and returned to in later films – with a focus on locating the methods by which she denies the male character at the center of her film authority over the two female figures, as he attempts to annex them to his self. It is this attempt by François to make Thérèse and Émilie adjuncts or

annexes to his subjectivity, defined in roles within his phallocentric framework, that Varda predominantly emphasizes in *Le bonheur*. In this article, I place this film along with other films by Varda films that scrutinize the positions created for women in Western society and the ways in which they can be resisted. In her study of Varda's career, Alison Smith has analyzed images and self-images of the feminine in six of Varda's films, but not *Le bonheur*.[9] I will also consider and seek to remedy some of the misunderstandings to which Flitterman-Lewis refers when she writes that *Le bonheur* is "a feminist critique of patriarchal structures" that critically explores "both the production of femininity and its representations, [which] are often not understood as such" (215).

The feminist mystery of *Le bonheur*

Varda has stated that *Le bonheur* was not received well by female spectators because of the perception that its primary female characters, Émilie and Thérèse, were merely objects defined, controlled, and finally substituted by the film's male subject, François. As Varda herself describes in an interview four years after *Le bonheur* was released, criticism of the film tended to conclude that the director was promoting the idea that

> the woman/wife can so easily be replaced by another woman/wife as long as she performs the same functions as her predecessor: cook the meals, take care of the kids, water the plants, kiss the husband, and let herself be fucked, etc.[10]

[place Figures 1, 2, and 3 here]

Contemporaneous commentators read the drudgery imposed on Thérèse, 'the wife' in the film, as a role for the feminine with which Varda aligned herself. Continuing this argument in her autobiography *Varda par Agnès*, Varda complains that feminists read her film in one of two ways: "j'étais en faveur de ménagères soumises à la loi des hommes volages, ou j'avais étudié la fonction de la femme dans la famille, mon film déclinait une mise en garde féministe […]."[11] Jill Forbes's analysis of *Le bonheur* as an "unforgiveable film" because of its uncritical portrait of a man who embarks on an affair despite his blissful marriage and domestic life, demonstrates such a critical misreading of the film.[12]

Instead of a simplistic portrayal of François's behaviour, there is a profundity to Varda's representation, an overemphasis that adopts cliché in order to undermine her male protagonist.[13] Varda has also suggested that in her depiction of patriarchal structures in the film, she "didn't denounce the myths," but instead "over-utilized them."[14] In other words, the filmmaker's intention was to present a hyperbolic exaggeration of the fallacies of masculine dominance in order to highlight them ironically.

As DeRoo's article has intimated, Varda's film critiques phallocentric frameworks similar to those detailed by de Beauvoir in *Le deuxième sexe*, in which woman is perpetually othered. For de Beauvoir, woman has become "the inessential who never goes back to being the essential, to be the absolute Other, without reciprocity."[15] This position is the one into which woman has been forced throughout history by man, relegated to the position of other, without hope of becoming subject (de Beauvoir 171). Equally, *Le bonheur* stands as a caustic assessment of the masculine delusion in which 'he' is the epicenter of all and the feminine is necessarily forced into a position of Otherness as a consequence. In this fantasy, Thérèse signifies a feminine figure as a traditional construct of the masculine-as-subject – a self-nominated position

reinforced by a history of patriarchy; she is a symbol of gendered difference and of maternity: the mother of François's children. Thérèse is defined as an other solely because her difference contrasts to the masculine as self-proposed subject. Yet, ironically, her otherness is simultaneously subsumed into the phallocentric model as she comes to accept and reflect the notion of the masculine subject in which her prior complexity and alterity are diluted.

Of the role of the maternal-feminine, Luce Irigaray asserts that it "has been assimilated before any perception of difference."[16] Forced to adopt such a role, Thérèse is incorporated as an annex to the masculine subject François; the boundaries between the two of them are obscured and, for him at least, rendered inconsequential. The character of Thérèse demonstrates how the masculine, symbolized by François, absorbs feminine alterity into his description of gendered roles: his wife and mother to his children. Thérèse's difference is defined by him and François recognizes her biological difference as a mother only as it benefits him. Through her, his paternity and fecundity are realized so that he can transcend time, cheat death.

The masculine-as-subject transcends his time by objectifying the feminine figure, as his male descendants born to her enable his access to a future beyond his own natural life in which they too – if the tradition advances – will also be subjects. Such roles as 'wife' and 'mother,' as defined by the masculine-as-subject for the feminine-as-other, serve to commit the violence of understanding feminine difference in a male context, reducing the alterity of the feminine figure and annexing the wife and mother to the masculine husband-patriarch. In this position, the feminine figure Thérèse, as far as François is concerned, is no more than an extension of his self. François destroys the radical alterity of the feminine other represented by Thérèse, whom he has designated as an annex to his self and then subsumed as a mother/wife. In diminishing Thérèse's difference, the alterity of the other wanes and is made part of the masculine-as-subject.

Once Thérèse dies, François attempts to annex Émilie in a similar manner. However, key scenes in the film reveal that the idea of the trading ~~of~~ one woman for another, the unchecked exchange of wife for mistress, belongs to François, the male lead, and not to Varda, the female director. It is Varda who, as she says, over-utilizes the myths of patriarchy, exaggerating them in order to parody the influence and arrogance of François. This approach is apparent in the sequences in which the director employs devices associated with contemporaneous *nouvelle vague* films and Pop Art works. For instance, a quarter of an hour into the film, when François meets Émilie for the first time at the post office, the final frame segues into the next scene via a still image of a billboard advertising shaving soap: "Un savon d'homme". This shot of the advert cuts to one in which François shaves in the kitchen on the left of screen and, as the frame is split in half by a doorjamb between two rooms, Thérèse dresses and feeds the children in the room on the right.

[place Figures 4 and 5 here]

Through the continuity of the barbering activity of the advert and the shot in the home, François is presented as *l'homme*, and Thérèse therefore as *la femme*. Varda's *mise-en-scène* divides the roles of François and Thérèse, whilst presenting them within a single frame. It is an indication of Thérèse's simultaneous position as a wife and mother with specific duties imposed on her by patriarchal society and as a part of the whole that includes François, her acceptance of these roles and their gradual weakening of her difference. However, the presence of the billboard within these constructions of meaning also demonstrates that these allegedly incontestable gender roles are just as authentic as the fabricated 'truths' found in advertising.

As this sequence continues, Thérèse enters the kitchen and asks whether François wants to see a movie at the cinema that evening. Emphasizing the irony inherent in Varda's depiction

of François as *un homme*, he replies that he would if they saw a Western. In response, Thérèse then describes a French film starring Brigitte Bardot and Jeanne Moreau, for the first time together. One might think from her synopsis that the film is more suited to Thérèse's predilections-than to François's. But Thérèse is alluding to another *rive gauche* director's film, Louis Malle's *Viva Maria* (1965), released in France several months after *Le bonheur*. Her allusion to Malle's film, a type of revisionist Western, in which the female leads dominate and pursue their own desires, is a perfunctory instant of dissent, however.[17] For then Thérèse asks, "lesquelles des deux préfères-tu?" and François mumbles, perhaps feeling guilty, "Moi?" Then Thérèse explains, "Comme femme?" He responds, "Comme femme? Toi!" After François's flirtation with Émilie in the previous scene, his compliment is as insubstantial as the role he performs.

[place Figure 6 here]

This scene cuts directly to a brief shot in which a colleague of François's from the carpentry shop where he works opens a cupboard door the inside of which is plastered with pictures of partially dressed women, including the two *nouvelle vague* stars, Moreau and Bardot. These images of female forms, sexualized and collected for the desirous hetero-masculine gaze mirrors British Pop artist Peter Blake's painting *Girlie Door* from 1959, which was painted to mimic the bedroom door of "a sexually obsessed adolescent."[18] In *Le bonheur*, the juxtaposition of François's dialogue and the shot of the clippings of women on the back of the door reinforces the notion of man's positioning and possession of woman as object of his desire and undermines François's trite reply, "Comme femme? Toi!" The spectator is already aware of exactly the level of commitment François has for his wife, having seen him flirt with Émilie in the previous scene. Further, the scene also implicates Thérèse as complicit in the sexualization of the feminine –

through her question "which do you prefer, as a woman?", rather than as an actress or artist – as she has been subsumed into the sphere of the masculine-as-subject represented by François's phallocentricism.

This scene exemplifies the creative decisions Varda makes in order to convey her message to the spectator of *Le bonheur*. Further, the manipulation of her materials and the creation of meaning either through the juxtaposition of signs or an emphasis on them within the planes of her *mise-en-scène* are indicated in Varda's appropriation of advertising images. For instance, there is the soap advert described above and, later in the film, of a poster publicizing Sylvie Vartan's latest record stuck to a wall in the carpentry shop and visible over François's shoulder as he works. This second image-can be read as a premonition of François's affair with Émilie, who also has an image of the yé-yé artist on the wall of her apartment. The earlier image speaks to the notion that Thérèse is an extension of François's self, a point that is further exemplified in the scenes at the end of the sequence in which Thérèse's and François's niece is born.

[place Figures 8 and 9 here]

Thérèse's allegiance to her husband's designation of her role is reiterated when she says to him, "J'espère que nous serons heureux," following which the sequence cuts to a further montage of Thérèse making the bed, kneading dough, and sewing a dress. These actions depict Thérèse's interpretation of what makes him happy, fulfilling her role as wife or, as Varda suggests, "performing functions" (Levitin 58). In response to Johnston's assertion that these scenes represent facile day-dreams, I argue that Varda's ironic use of advertising images and repetitious staccato montage emphasizes the myth and monotony that these chores can represent for women in Thérèse's position. It is as if Thérèse were no more than an automaton. Varda

creates images in which the roles and images imposed on the feminine are exaggerated, but not to the extent that they cannot be recognized.

In a critique of the influence Jean-Paul Sartre had over Beauvoir published a decade and a half after *Le bonheur* was released, Michèle Le Dœuff analyzes the image of the feminine as the other to the masculine subject. In Beauvoir, Le Dœuff claims, "women (real women) have no reason to be concerned by that femininity; we are constantly being confronted with that image, but we do not have to recognize ourselves in it."[19] Le Dœuff goes so far as to describe the situation of woman as that of "an internal enemy" within the masculine set-up (115). Varda also describes an extreme example of the feminine image created within a patriarchal framework, but unlike Le Dœuff, Varda identifies the phantom presence of the contemporary woman within such negative images of the feminine, continuously repeating these images in *Le bonheur*. Consequently, Thérèse is a drone designed to fulfil a role. These devices of exaggeration and repetition along with the appropriation of the advertising image as an agent to undermine gender-specific roles promoted in the media, establish Varda's stance *against* the male fantasy that refuses Thérèse her alterity, the plurality of her self.

This denial of Thérèse's complexity as an independent character is particularly manifest in the scenes of her death. Late in the film, François tells her of his affair with Émilie as they lie in verdant surrounds, and he assures her he is just increasing his happiness and has enough love for both women: "le bonheur s'additionne." They make love and afterward, as he sleeps, she slips away. Later, awakening to find Thérèse absent and after a lengthy search, he comes across a crowd gathered around her corpse. Bending over her lifeless form, he hugs her to him. There is an arrhythmical repetition in this last gesture as François raises Thérèse's body to his chest, in a gesture speaks to his guilt, loss, confusion, and the asynchronicity of his emotions. Varda

previously used such jump cuts in the opening scenes of *Cléo de 5 à 7* that, according to Janice Mouton, 'disturb' the spectator.[20] In *Le bonheur*, this sequence is a stuttering intervention in the linear passage of the film and an indication of François's brief recognition of his complicity in Thérèse's death. He has led her to this event, whether it was suicide or an accident, through his arrogance, his disregard for Thérèse's sovereign self.

[Place Figure 7 here]

However, this scene does not represent the first entrance of death into the film. Instead, it is through Thérèse's position as mother that death initially enters into the family unit. De Beauvoir writes of masculine disgust of the slimy embryo that "begins the cycle that is completed in the putrefaction of death" (178). Even as this combining of maternity and death is presented by de Beauvoir as a masculine construct, Varda employs the idea to undermine François's complacency. He considers that his boy-child offers his genes the transcendence of the present, as they are carried by him into a future moment, but birth is the first step towards death. As De Beauvoir continues, "if germination is always associated with death, so is death with fecundity" (179). Death haunts the film and the family, as a constant reminder that everything degenerates. If Varda identifies herself not as a feminist filmmaker but rather as a female creator, de Beauvoir's feminist-phenomenological thinking nevertheless echoes throughout *Le bonheur*, personified in the cynically-treated character of Thérèse who represents the feminine body as a site of death. Where Varda's critique of patriarchy incorporates the destruction of Thérèse, first as her alterity is subsumed and then as she is quite literally expunged, Émilie embodies death not as the conclusion to but as a presence within life.

This death is one that Émilie carries with her and thus controls. Varda has spoken of the director Jacques Rivette's interpretation of Marie-France Boyer who plays Émilie as a

personification of death: "with her steely blue eyes and her pallor."[21] "Once she appears," Varda continues, "death makes its way, effects its substitutions right through to the end" (Fieschi and Ollier 34). Émilie is a signifier of death's presence rather than its personification. This is not the death superimposed onto the feminine by the masculine, the association of death with fecundity critiqued in de Beauvoir's writing (179), but the reality of a death that haunts every life. For François, Émilie is the tempting, desired feminine object, yet she also precipitates death's arrival. Initially, she is therefore presented by Varda as a *femme fatale* of a type, symbolizing mysterious sexuality and simultaneously denoting the proximity of death.

Émilie displays the "complex psychological and social identity" that *film noir* expert Julie Grossman writes is typical of the *femme fatale*.[22] Unlike the indoctrinated, homogenized, subservient Thérèse, who is seemingly sacrificed to Varda's caustic commentary on what it means to be female in mid-sixties France (and beyond), Émilie symbolizes an intricate self that is too complex simply to be slotted into a role devised by the masculine figure. Indeed, François attempts to diminish Émilie's alterity, enclosing her within or incorporating her in his understanding of the feminine, but she resists. The death that she represents – appropriately for the complex psycho-social identity of a *femme fatale* – is unknown to François, a shadow that cannot be grasped, subsumed into his concept of love, or what is simply sexual desire. There is a plurality to Émilie that the masculine cannot determine and therefore possess as an image that he invents, and in Varda's scathing evaluation, this multiplicity is typified by death's presence. Both these ideas of a mystery or death that cannot be incorporated and the possession of perfected images of the feminine ~~each~~ manifest themselves in the space of Émilie's apartment.

On its walls Émilie has pinned portraits, evidently cut from magazines, of both male and female 'stars', not only Vartan, Bardot, and Monroe, but also the *nouvelle vague* anti-hero Jean-

Paul Belmondo, which contrast with the star-images in the carpenter's shop of inadequately dressed singers and actresses. Through these and other images, Varda creates a space in which she challenges the masculine gaze's dominance of the feminine as other, a gaze that Griselda Pollock argues has existed throughout the history of image–creation as a "presumed masculine spectator *at* the objectified female form."[23] While Thérèse, the representative of the feminine figure annexed to a masculine subject, reiterates this prejudiced ideology when she asks François "lesquelles des deux préfères-tu?" Émilie exists in a space where the images of Moreau, Bardot, and Belmondo are equals. Bardot's image is an appropriate cynosure for raising questions about the feminine gaze at female and male forms.

[Place Figure 10 here]

In homage to the phenomenon of "B.B.", de Beauvoir writes that the *nouvelle vague* star challenges man's role as the subject and owner of the gaze by embracing her sexuality and concurrently objectifying him just as he does her, recognizing that "between the woman and him there is mutual desire and pleasure."[24] Through a performance of her own sexual desire and allure, by meeting the male gaze with her own Bardot exemplifies a complex feminine figure, rather than a base image of male desire. Martin Jay ascribes these active and passive roles within the gaze to a subject and an Other, writing that "the one who casts the look is always the subject and the one who is its target is always turned into an object."[25] The gazer is the subject, the gazed upon the object of their look. By showing images of male and female celebrities (especially that of Bardot) that adorn the walls of Émilie's apartment, Varda questions uncomplicated, gendered positioning of subjects and objects, or others. According to Rosello, the director continued to challenge this hierarchy of the gaze in her 2000 film *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* (35). In *Le bonheur* Bardot signifies, ambivalently and simultaneously, the object of the

gaze and the subject gazing, the perceived and the perceiver. The clippings in her apartment are also lent emphasis by being the only decoration in Émilie's flat, which is predominantly painted white.

Émilie inhabits this ghostly space penetrated by brilliant light – the affair between her and François primarily takes place in the glare of the afternoon sun – which is reminiscent of an anteroom. Varda has spoken of the colour white in *Le bonheur* as representing ~~for her~~ "love and death" for her (Fieschi and Ollier 34). Émilie's blanched living space, then, represents a domain of death and the fantasy of love between her and François. White is also a foundational color, one that is dominated by or covered over by other colors which is exactly what François does, painting various parts of this space for Émilie. Yet, instead of Émilie's becoming associated with one of the colors with which François decorates the apartment, from the moment of their first encounter she gradually becomes associated with the color lavender.[11] In earlier scenes there are distant hints of the color at the peripheries of the frame, but after Thérèse's death, the color floods the *mise-en-scène*. This appropriation of the frame by this color is particularly evident in a late establishing shot of the post office where Émilie works in which the wide-angle framing reveals that the whole façade of the building is painted lavender, and in a late scene in Émilie's home in which she is swathed in a large, lavender dressing gown. Émilie becomes intrinsically associated with this color which has a pervasive presence in these shots.

[Place Figure 11 here]

As these scenes occur after Thérèse's death, they could be simply considered as moments at which Émilie is taking her place as wife and mother. I argue that they are more crucially indicative of Varda's play with color schemes throughout the film. Lavender is Émilie's color, and it is her that accepts and even personifies the presence of death. Where François denies the

presence of death, repressing or ignoring his responsibility for Thérèse's death, Émilie acknowledges this presence. She demonstrates her complexity, her consideration of another without annexing their subjectivity to hers and thereby diluting their alterity. Death's resistance to explication and Émilie's association with it – through her pallor, her location within the white walls of what seems to be an anteroom and even her responsibility in and for the death of Thérèse – ensure that as she is drawn into the natural world that surrounds and enfolds the family unit in the later images of the film, it remains possible to retain independence from François's homogenizing intent.

Initially, Varda seems to propose that Émilie's destiny may be to reiterate Thérèse's role as mother and wife since images of Emilie late in the film repeat earlier shots of Thérèse making the bed, kneading dough, sewing a dress, 'performing functions' and of *l'homme,* François, shaving. In these later scenes Émilie puts the children to bed and irons, fulfilling 'her' domestic chores, and François shaves and works in the carpenter's shop. Apparently François is attempting to domesticate Émilie as a direct replacement for Thérèse. Yet these apparent copies of earlier scenes are in fact simulacra, different from their supposed originals. For instance, in these later scenes, lavender infiltrates the frame. Death has slipped in. It enters into the family unit, haunting their quotidian lives. And this death, represented by Émilie, is the very difference inherent in these repetitions.

Varda emphasizes this notion in the opening and closing scenes of the film in which the Chevaliers stroll through bucolic backdrops. In the final shots, the image of the new family unit dissolves into the autumnal countryside and in the opening images a close-up of a single sunflower cuts to a wider shot of a field of sunflowers from the background of which the family of Thérèse, François, and their children appear and meander towards the camera in blurred

depth-of-field. In both scenes, each character is subsumed into the image, a fertile metaphor for the incorporation of each individual of the family into one entity. The characters emerge from nature, barely distinguishable from the colors that surround them, their undefined forms reminiscent of the pointillist brushwork of some Impressionist painters, as in Georges Seurat's *Une baignade à Asnières* (1884), and also the post-Impressionism of Van Gogh's *tournesols* series (1888). In several scenes throughout the film, this idyllic, pastoral world envelops the family as they are immersed in nature. In the final autumnal scene of Le bonheur, which recalls the opening shots where the family blend with the corn-field, with Émilie now substituted for Thérèse, the family again merge with their backdrop. Their clothing matches the shades of the leaves and trees so perfectly that they again coalesce with the flora.

[Place Figures 12 and 13 here]

In an early review of Varda's film, Max Kozloff reads the mirroring of these two scenes and the replacement of Thérèse with Émilie as part of the same "earthly cycle."[26] Yet~~, as I have argued,~~ death exists as a presence in both versions of the family, and in the latter not only through the literal death of Thérèse and the indicators of death that surround Émilie, but also the death of the masculine fallacy that women are merely objects to be desired, to facilitate paternity, to clean, and to tend. Notable differences exist between the opening and closing scenes of the film, differences that speak to this notion of a haunting death. Where in the earlier scenes, the presence of death is ignored, in a reversal of what becomes of the walls of Émilie's apartment, in the perfected family unit in which the father-husband is dominant death is a shadow cast out by the light of fantasy. François cannot conceive of the end of his supremacy or of his subjectivity. Through his boy-child, his genes survive his own death and patriarchy maintained. Conversely, in the later scenes, death is represented in the progression of the seasons, from summer to

autumn, a movement in which death draws the whole family into its embrace. The autumnal scenes are idyllic but are mixed with notes of melancholy as the umber, rust, and amber shades of the decaying foliage surrounding this new iteration of the Chevalier family anticipate the anaemic winter months. This foretelling of death is significant for Varda's sardonic critique of the systemic violence inherent in the patriarchy. Where de Beauvoir condemns the patriarchal association of female biological alterity (the womb) with death (179), Varda, I argue, embraces such an affinity in her critique of François's arrogance.

Instead of allowing a space for François to repeat his imposition of gender roles, Émilie's acceptance of death – the recognition that death haunts each life – resists her being defined by the masculine character of François. He cannot define death, he does not accept its presence in his version of happiness. He tries to diminish the otherness of Émilie through his insistence on placing her in the role of mistress, 'his' lover, and then by positioning her as a direct replacement for Thérèse. He seeks to reduce Émilie's subjective complexities into a role designated by a phallocentric society, thereby divesting her of her plurality. She counters this attempt by resisting being defined, even while this resistance involves a necessarily bleak acceptance of death, an acceptance which does not align with the fantasy of the masculine subject and Varda's critique of that subjectivity.

Through Émilie's resistance, Varda states that she is "trying to show the cruelty of the myth of 'Let's try to be always and simply happy,' which implies, for a man, the myth of 'if she is nice and quiet at home it's enough'" (Varda, *Women & Film*, 39). The character of Émilie thereby signifies the complexity of a manifold self, an individual who accepts life and death. In this way, Émilie resists the masculine figure's dominance, definition, and homogenization in a

phallocentric paradigm, personifying Varda's critique of the feminine as merely an annex to the masculine.

In *Le bonheur* Varda responds to feminist questions about the restrictive roles applied to women in a patriarchal society. As a woman who makes films, rather than as an essentially ~~a~~ feminist filmmaker, the director creates in *Le bonheur* a scathing critique of the prejudiced orthodoxy in which François attempts to annex Émilie and Thérèse as mothers, wives, and lovers. *Le bonheur* is part of Varda's *œuvre* as a female filmmaker who actively engages with feminist concerns. Seen through the prism of film theory and feminist thought, *Le bonheur* grapples with issues of the aesthetic representation of women and the roles that they are expected to fulfil to meet a patriarchal paragon of femininity or the feminine. This article, then, places *Le bonheur* in the canon of Varda's other films that pursue similar outcomes; namely, the erosion of the phallocentric paradigm that promotes the objectification of women.

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Notes

[1] Kate Ince, "Feminist Phenomenology and the Film World of Agnès Varda," *Hypatia*, 28:3 (Summer 2013): 603.

[2] Geneviève Sellier, *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema*, Kristin Ross, trans. (Durham: Duke U P, 2008), 218; Susan Hayward, "Beyond the Gaze and Into Femme-filmécriture: Agnès Varda's *Sans toit ni loi*," in *French Film: Texts and Contexts*, 2nd edition, Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau, eds. (London: Routledge, 2000), 270; Mireille Rosello,

"Agnés Varda's *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse*: Portrait of the Artist as an Old Lady," *Studies in French Cinema*, 1:1 (2000): 35.

[3] Kelley Conway, *Agnès Varda* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2015), 5.

[4] Rebecca J. DeRoo, "Unhappily Ever After: Visual Irony and Feminist Strategy in Agnès Varda's *Le bonheur*," *Studies in French Cinema*, 8:3 (2008): 191.

[5] Agnès Varda, "Agnès Varda: *One Sings, the Other Doesn't*," in *Art, Politics, Cinema: The Cineaste Interviews*, Dan Georgakas and Lenny Rubenstein, eds. (London: Pluto Press, 1985), 217.

[6] Delphine Bénézet, *The Cinema of Agnès Varda: Resistance and Eclecticism* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2014), 10.

[7] Claire Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema," in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, Sue Thornham, ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U P, 1999), 39.

[8] Hilary Neroni, *Feminist Film Theory and "Cléo from 5 to 7"* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).

[9] Alison Smith, *Agnes Varda* (Manchester: Manchester U P, 1998), 92–141.

[10] Mireille Amiel, "Agnès Varda Talks about the Cinema," in *Agnès Varda: Interviews*, T. Jefferson Kline, ed. (Jackson: U. P. of Mississippi, 2014), 75.

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